



## **Fantastic Beasts and Where to Print Them: Mapping Monsters in Nineteenth-Century Newspapers**

**Michael Horton**

### **Abstract**

Harpies roaming Spain, mud-vampires in Texas, man-eating plants in Madagascar, sea-serpents off Norway: while we might expect to find monsters of this nature in medieval and early-modern print culture when the uncharted edges of maps still bore illustrations of mythological creatures and warnings that “here be dragons,” surprisingly reports about preternatural creatures and unusual happenings continued to be published in nineteenth-century newspapers. This paper explores “weird news,” press representations of monsters, mythical creatures, and other preternatural phenomena in the nineteenth-century press, with a focus on both the monster and its location in each of the articles discussed. The paper maps or “re-maps” the locations of the monsters in these digitally sourced articles to identify three key areas where the majority of monsters were supposedly found according to this genre of journalism: in areas of interest to the British Empire, frontier zones within western nations that might cause anxiety, and at sea. The paper argues that racial, imperial, nationalistic and scientific ideologies are expressed in how these locations are exoticised, rendered uncanny or otherwise transformed into fantastic and Gothic spaces. In relating the Imperial and Nautical Gothic to “weird news,” this paper also serves as a rebuttal to the notion of disenchantment proposed by Max Weber.

### **Keywords**

monster; disenchantment; Gothic; fantastic; empire; mapping; supernatural; Victorian; journalism; news

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## Fantastic Beasts and Where to Print Them: Mapping Monsters in Nineteenth-Century Newspapers

Michael Horton

Here be dragons. We associate these words with the awe-inspiring, terrifying and fantastic beasts that roam the corners of ancient maps, where the frontiers of human knowledge met the mists of uncharted territory. These eldritch creatures – including leviathans, krakens, serpents, mermaids, hybrid beasts and other antediluvian horrors – populated medieval and Renaissance maps as a reminder of the anxieties of exploration. Figure 1, a detail from Olaus Magnus's *Carta Marina* (1539), is an illustrative example.



Figure 1. Olaus Magnus, *Carta Marina* (1539) (detail)

(Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carta\\_marina#/media/File:Carta\\_Marina.jpeg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carta_marina#/media/File:Carta_Marina.jpeg)).

This cross-section of Magnus's richly detailed map teems with monsters and otherworldly creatures. However, when we compare this map and others like it such as Beatus's *Mappaemundi* (AD 776) and Ptolemy's *Geography* (AD 150) with examples of cartography from the nineteenth century, it is immediately apparent that the strange and wonderful creatures have seemingly disappeared.



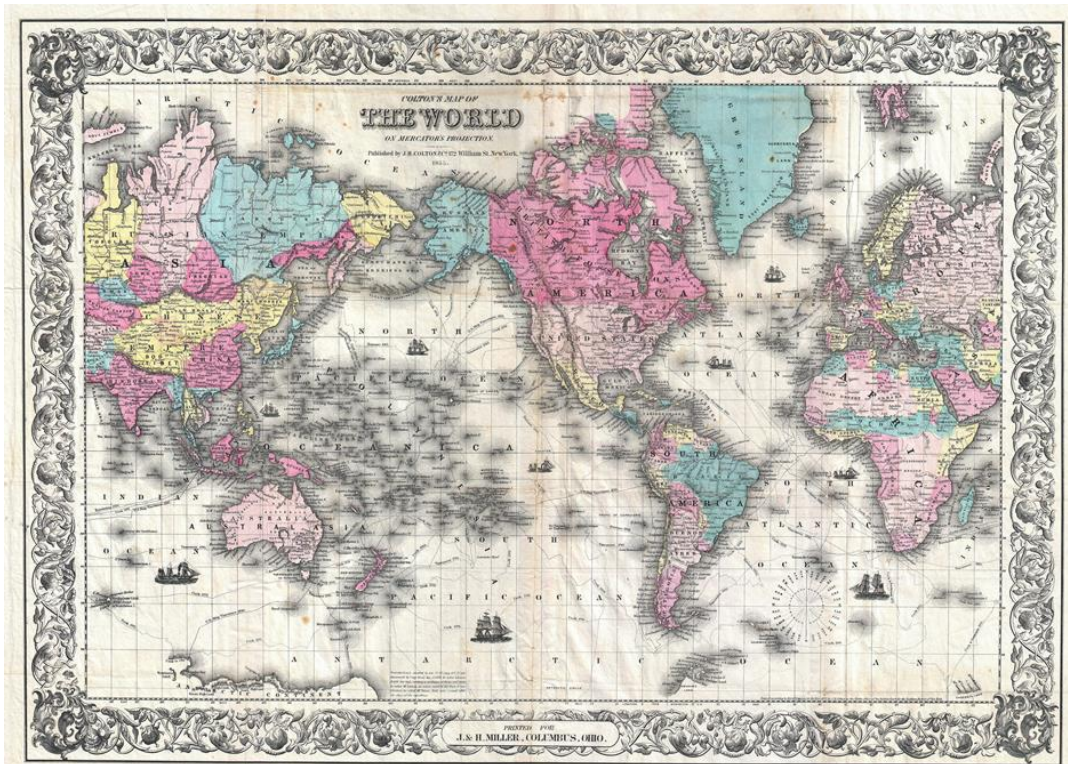


Figure 2. J. H. Colton, *Map of the World on Mercator's Projection* (prepared 1852, published 1855)  
 (Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1852\\_Colton%27s\\_Map\\_of\\_the\\_World\\_on\\_Mercator%27s\\_Projection\\_\(Pocket\\_Map\)\\_-Geographicus-World-colton-1852.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1852_Colton%27s_Map_of_the_World_on_Mercator%27s_Projection_(Pocket_Map)_-Geographicus-World-colton-1852.jpg)).



Figure 3. Walter Crane, *Imperial Federation: Map Showing the Extent of the British Empire in 1886*  
 (Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Imperial\\_Federation,\\_Map\\_of\\_the\\_World\\_Showing\\_the\\_Extent\\_of\\_the\\_British\\_Empire\\_in\\_1886.jpg#/media/File:Imperial\\_Federation,\\_Map\\_of\\_the\\_World\\_Showing\\_the\\_Extent\\_of\\_the\\_British\\_Empire\\_in\\_1886\\_\(levelled\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Imperial_Federation,_Map_of_the_World_Showing_the_Extent_of_the_British_Empire_in_1886.jpg#/media/File:Imperial_Federation,_Map_of_the_World_Showing_the_Extent_of_the_British_Empire_in_1886_(levelled).jpg)).

Figure 2, an 1855 map by J. H. Colton, depicts a fully charted world, devoid of the fantastic beasts of earlier epochs. Instead, the even placement of sail- and steamships elucidates a clear sense of the global reach of travel and commerce. This is a stark contrast to the galivanting monsters of Magnus's *Carta Marina*, which not only dominate the image but are shown to be destroying several of the ships on the map, thereby demonstrating the anxieties about sea-travel prevalent in 1539 (Duzer 2013: 116). Even the most lavishly illustrated of maps in the nineteenth century, such as figure 3, an 1886 example by Walter Crane, show a marked difference in the representation and purpose of strange creatures. Crane's map, unlike Colton's, prominently depicts animals such as tigers, elephants and kangaroos; however, unlike Magnus's beasts, these creatures are not in the least monstrous, fantastic, or marvellous. Instead, they demonstrate the reach of the British Empire and serve as totems of the exotic lands to which it laid claim.

Upon first examination, then, it would be tempting to conclude that the monsters simply disappeared. Indeed, Chet Van Duzer and Joseph Nigg, two prominent scholars of the "geography of the marvelous" (Duzer 2013: 11), indicate that increasing confidence in sea-travel, a declining interest in wonders, the end of the age of exploration and the scientific categorisation of animals were the chief causes for the demise of these cartographical monsters (Duzer 2013: 166; Niggs 2013: 8–9). Both Niggs and Duzer conform to the theory of disenchantment proposed by Max Weber that "the fate of our times is characterised by the rationalisation and intellectualisation and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world" (quoted by Duchemin 2009: 1). History, according to this argument, is the teleological progression of simplistic societies capable of genuine belief in the supernatural and the marvellous towards an enlightened society in which preternatural thinking is eroded away.

However, I will propose that monsters merely migrated from the increasingly intellectualised and scientific medium of cartography to new mediums where the truth itself is difficult to chart: journalism and popular fiction. Contrary to assumptions made by proponents of disenchantment about a near-modern nineteenth-century society, numerous reports of fantastic monsters, impossible flora and other preternatural phenomena persisted throughout the period not only in Gothic, adventure and science fiction but also in the pages of the periodical press. As Matthew Rubery notes, the nineteenth century was a "newspaperized world," "an age covered in and by newsprint" "when journalism may be said to be as universal as air or light," as one contemporary newspaper contributor stated (Rubery 2009: 17, 4, 6). As arguably the most abundant and important medium of the nineteenth century, newsprint can help us understand the cultural preoccupations and concerns of the British public in this period (Phillips 1907–21: n.p.). However, despite the prominence of newsprint during this period, periodical research has suffered from problems of access that have impeded scholarship in comparison to literary criticism. Only relatively recently has the mass digitisation of newspaper archives opened up previously unexplored resources to scholars, making it much easier to locate sources in this vast body of material. This digital archive also contains reports of monster sightings, including descriptions of sea-serpents disrupting trade in the Pacific ("Marine Monster" 1876: 2), fishermen being attacked in the Shetland Islands ("Encounter with Sea Monster" 1882: 7), man-eating trees devouring sacrifices in Madagascar ("Man-Eating Tree of Madagascar" 1877: 4), mud-vampires sucking the blood of frontiersmen's horses in America ("Monsters of South America" 1843: 4) and hundreds of other news items featuring bizarre creatures and circumstances. I will refer to such monster stories and other peculiar specimens of nineteenth-century newspaper articles and images collectively as "weird news."



Nineteenth-century weird news relates to several existing discourses about nineteenth-century British audiences and their reception of the strange and peculiar in popular culture. As Rubery acknowledges, “the very distinction between ‘journalist’ and ‘novelist’ would have made little sense to a generation of writers who had always moved seamlessly between these different categories” (Rubery 2009: 12). The study of the strange and monstrous in nineteenth-century fiction, particularly the Gothic, is well-established. My reading of the locations and agenda of weird news draws on formulations of the Imperial Gothic and the Nautical Gothic by Patrick Brantlinger (1988) and Emily Alder (2017), and is particularly informed by Brantlinger’s analysis of how the overlapping matrices of imperialism, racism, the monstrous orient and the Gothic, often presented in garish and racist depictions of savage cannibals and other grotesqueries, were used to justify imperial actions (Brantlinger 2011: 2). James Mussell’s work on the “uneasy space between the delightfully strange and strident progress” in magazines such as the *Strand* represents a notable example of research into representations of the weird in nineteenth-century periodicals; Mussell argues that “scientific subjects also provided a striking range of interesting, dramatic and often uncanny images for the general reader,” further establishing nineteenth-century British society’s fascination with the preternatural and its ambiguous relationship with science (Mussell 2009: 214, 207).

That the nineteenth century continued to have its own monsters is, perhaps, not so surprising. According to Stephen T. Asma, monsters serve an important role:

Monster derives from the Latin word *monstrum*, which in turns derives from the root *monere* (to warn). To be a monster is to be an omen ... The monster is more than an odious creature of the imagination; it is a kind of cultural category, employed in domains as diverse as religion, biology, literature, and politics.

(Asma 2009: 13)

Monsters, then, are not simply a trope designed to entertain and terrify: they also possess a cultural malleability that allows them to act as signifiers in multiple media. This is a notion further supported by China Miéville who asserts that “Epochs throw up the monsters they need. History can be written of monsters, and in them” (Miéville 2012: 143). Not only are monsters a product of their time: they can also be a symbol of it, formed from and representing the anxieties, concerns, power dynamics and culture of the time that spawns them. If the monsters that once visibly lurked upon maps represented the beliefs and the fears of the time that produced them, the nineteenth-century monsters that skulk from the pages of weird news can also tell us much about this later, near-modern period. Journalism may have become a refuge for monsters and weird news because newspapers, while possessing a claim to truth, are less beholden to facts than ostensibly scientific documents like maps. Matthew Arnold describes the mercurial nature of truth in newsprint in his discussion of the sensational “New Journalism” of the late century:

A new journalism ... full of ability, novelty, variety, sensation, sympathy, generous instincts; its one great fault is that it is feather-brained. It throws out assertions at a venture because it wishes them true; does not correct either them or itself, if they are false; and to get at the state of things as they truly are seems to feel no concern whatever.

(Arnold 1887: n. p.)

Andrew Pettegree also notes that “truth was seldom as entertaining as tall stories; news men were often tempted to pass off the one as the other” (Pettegree 2014: 13). This process was made easier by the intertextuality between fiction and journalism in this period, as noted by Kevin Williams (2010: 11), David Cannadine (2018: 259) and Matthew Rubery, who rejects “the anachronistic divide between journalism and literature” as this “would have made little sense at a time when much of the prose written by Victorian novelists bore some relationship

to the periodical press in terms of style, subject, or source” (Rubery 2009: 11). Because of the indeterminate generic status of journalism, the monsters of weird news are particularly ambiguous and versatile cultural signifiers.

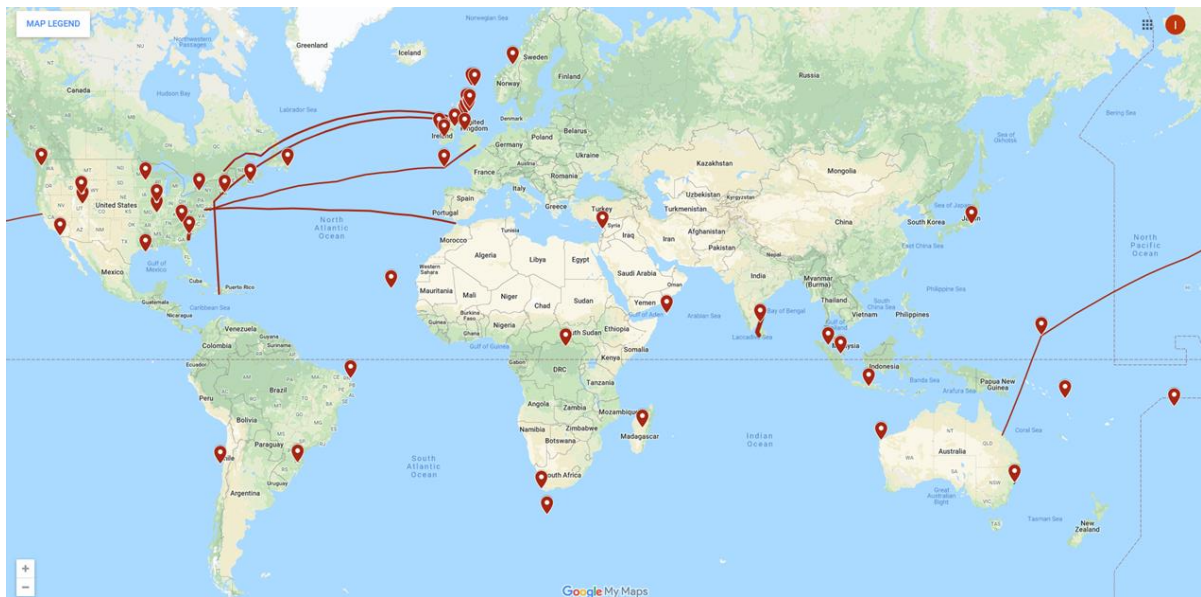


Figure 4. *Monsters in Newspapers, 1800–99.*  
(Source: the author; made with *Google Maps*.)

Due to journalism being, for the most part, a written medium, it is more difficult to visualise the relationship between the monsters of weird news and the spaces they occupy than it is to do the same for the illustrated creatures of medieval and Renaissance maps. However, by using examples of monster sightings in weird news it is possible to remap these fantastic beasts and repopulate the atlas with creatures that, like the earlier monstrosities, visibly reassert the continued existence of an enchanted (or at least semi-enchanted) worldview during the nineteenth century. Figure 4 shows the supposed locations of a small proportion of the monsters reported in British newspapers between January 1800 and December 1899. The datapoints on this map represent the individual monster sightings found on the *British Library Newspapers 1800–1900* database using the keyword search term “monster.” As the word “monster” was by no means the only term used to describe weird news and the database only covers a selection of newspapers, the 56 monster encounters plotted on this map only constitute a small proportion of the weird news published in this period. A single mark on the map registers each monster’s location, ignoring repeats and reprints which could inflate the number of monster articles significantly. Lines indicate that the monster was encountered when travelling between two points, usually on a sea journey, in an unspecified location. The same monster has only been noted on the map twice if enough time had passed for sightings to be considered separate incidents. Even this small sample reveals telling insights into the locations where monsters were typically imagined to exist during the nineteenth century.

Mapping locations sourced from nineteenth-century newspaper articles with twenty-first-century mapping tools presents some methodological challenges. Several of the areas identified in examples of weird news have subsequently changed name or the spelling of their name. Others have fallen victim to shifting boundaries, redevelopment, or even more dramatic geographical transformations. For example, one article discusses a “Bear Lake Monster” to be found in “Bear Creek, Ride County, Utah” (“The Bear Lake Monster” 1874:

7). However, there is no, and apparently never has been, a Ride County in Utah. There is currently a Bear Creek, but this is a considerable distance from the Bear Lake mentioned in the article. There is also a county nearby named Bear Lake, but this was not established until a year after the publication of this article. To make matters even more confusing, there was also a Bear River in close proximity to all these locations. As a result, mapping this specific monster with absolute certainty or precision proved impossible and required an educated guess with the information available. More dramatically, the “Thompson Lake” mentioned in an 1894 article entitled “A Huge Lake Monster” no longer exists in its original location, having been converted into land and replaced by the New Thompson Lake, which is some distance away (“A Huge Lake Monster” 1894: 7; “Thompson Lake (historical)”). When using a modern map to chart Victorian datapoints, it is important to bear in mind that the very shapes and names of countries and borders have shifted dramatically since the nineteenth century. The world as shown on a modern map may also not reflect the appearance of the area in the nineteenth century. For example, the Bear Lake article, when mapped onto a modern atlas, shows the surrounding area as being well-developed, whereas a map entitled *Distribution of the Constitutional Population in 1870* shows that the entire Bear Lake area had a population density of only 2–6 people per square mile. Despite these issues, a modern map can help to register geographic patterns in nineteenth-century weird news. A large proportion of supposed encounters with monsters took place in three distinct areas: in the British Empire and its fringes; on “frontiers” within western nations; and at sea.

The global reach of the British Empire and, perhaps more importantly, the global reach of British journalism in the nineteenth century allowed for narratives from across the planet, including previously unknown locales, to come to British readers’ knowledge. In her analysis of the Imperial Gothic, Karen Macfarlane connects the Empire with institutions and practices designed to discover, accumulate and catalogue knowledge from foreign climates, such as museums, botanical and zoological discoveries, anthropological studies and exploratory expeditions, the resulting knowledge of colonised spaces signifying an imperial mastery and authority (Macfarlane 2016: 75). However, Macfarlane notes that unknown spaces can make Victorian imperial anxieties manifest:

While the physical “blank spaces” on the maps that fuelled the imaginations of early generations of imperialist writers had been filled in by the late nineteenth century, the terrifying, unknowable, unrepresentable blank spaces that shape the Imperial Gothic remained hidden at the borders of Imperial control. ... In Imperial Gothic fiction these fears appear as a series of complex explorations of the ways in which the gap between the known and the unknown can be charted.

(Macfarlane 2016: 75)

Macfarlane argues that while the Empire had been successful in filling the edges of the map, lack of knowledge about colonised spaces still provoked fears over the permanence of imperial authority. If the Imperial Gothic uses the unknown and the uncategorisable as signifiers of the limitations of knowledge and contemporary imperial anxieties, the monsters of weird news function in much the same way, while suggesting the monstrous threats themselves might be real rather than just representative of cultural anxieties. Indeed, the fact that so many of the monsters in weird news appear near to the fringes of the Empire indicates a strong similarity between the genres of the Imperial Gothic and weird news. However, while for Macfarlane the unknown represents a threat to the Empire and demonstrates the unsustainability of the imperial idea, weird news frequently introduces monsters or otherworldly phenomena to justify imperial possession.

Figure 5 depicts the events described in an 1876 article in the *Illustrated Police News* about a native sponge-diver of Batroun, Lebanon, who was supposedly swallowed alive by a

sea monster. It depicts the native workers as terrified and helpless, so frenzied that they appear to be capsizing their dinghy in their panic. In contrast to the native fishermen, there are several European ships in the background and a boat of European soldiers rowing out towards the monster instead of fleeing from it. The power dynamics are clear: the native workers are presented as irrational, helpless and dependent on the calm, collected colonial forces that will defend them. This scene of racial disparity appears to be the creation of the illustrator as no such rescue effort is described in the accompanying article, which is instead alive to British commercial interests. The account in the article comes from a “report of the trade of Syria,” in which “her Majesty’s vice-consul at Beyrout” “states that the crop of sponges was very deficient, in consequence of the appearance of a sea monster” (“A Diver Swallowed by a Sea Monster” 1876: 2). Both the monster and the tragic death of the worker remain strikingly out of focus, with the latter quickly dismissed with the observation that “the actual injury done seems to have been confined to one man” (“A Diver Swallowed by a Sea Monster” 1876: 2). Instead, the focus turns to the trade dimensions of the location as the final, and only, concern of the writer is that “there was such a fright among the divers that many of them ceased operations, and the deficiency in the quantity of sponges obtained ran prices up” (“A Diver Swallowed by a Sea Monster” 1876: 2). In this example, weird news communicates perceptions of foreign vulnerability that could be used to justify imperial, “moral,” intervention in defence of British commercial interests – so much so that the existential implications of monsters seem secondary to the financial implications. Unlike in Imperial Gothic fiction, the monster, though uncategorised and unknown, is not used to undermine confidence in the imperial project but instead confirms the supposed superiority of European races and showcases the exotic spread of British interests in different parts of the world.



Figure 5. “A Sponge Diver Swallowed by a Sea Monster”

(Source: *Illustrated Police News*, 2 September 1876: 1).  
Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive [www.BritishNewspaperArchive.co.uk](http://www.BritishNewspaperArchive.co.uk)).



The relationship between space, knowledge and the projection of western, particularly British, power is a frequent topic in weird news. As the press reports of the Man-Eating Tree of Madagascar demonstrate, weird news represents these matrices very differently from the Imperial Gothic. This hoax originated with a letter supposedly written by the entirely fictional Karl Leche published in the *New York World* in 1874 and subsequently reprinted across the world (Boese). The story was so popular that it inspired several expeditions to Madagascar to find this carnivorous plant, even after the account had been proven a hoax and the story exposed as merely the re-printed creation of a little-known author called Edmund Spencer. The idea of a deadly carnivorous plants undoubtedly captured the Victorian imagination and appeared in texts such as H. G. Wells's "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid" (1894) and Arthur Conan Doyle's "The American's Tale" (1879). The most notable of these expeditions to Madagascar in search of the murderous tree was led by Chase Salmon Osborn, who named his 1924 travelogue *Madagascar: Land of the Man-Eating Tree* (Boese). The *Belfast News-Letter* describes a horrifying scene of human sacrifice:

The Mkodos are a very primitive race, going entirely naked, having only faint vestiges of tribal relations, and no religion beyond that awful reverence which they pay to the sacred tree ... With still wilder shrieks and chants they surrounded one of the women, and urged her with the points of their javelins, until slowly ... she climbed up ... the tree ... the tendrils ... like great green serpents ... wrapt her about fold after fold, ever tightening ... and now the great leaves rose slowly ... approaching one another, and closed about the dead and hampered victim with the silent force of a hydraulic press ... a moment more ... there trickled down the stalk streams of the viscid honey-like fluid, mingled horribly with the blood and oozing viscera of the victim. At sight of this the savage hordes ... bounded forward ... and with cups, leaves, hands and tongues got ... the liquor ... then ensued a grotesque ... orgie.

("Man-Eating Tree of Madagascar" 1877: 4)

Such press reports construct the island of Madagascar as a "savage" land, the nightmare abode of monsters, cannibals, voracious flora and deadly landscapes where every taboo is broken. The story implies, therefore, that Madagascar is in desperate need of a "civilising," preferably British, force to impose order and tame the monstrous; indeed, Britain and America were both meddling in Madagascar affairs during the reign of Queen Ranavalona II (1868–83) by supplying weaponry (*Searching in History* 2014). Not only does Leche, the representative of western culture in the story, maintain moral superiority due to his horrified reaction but his deployment of scientific methods of observation and sampling also exhibits the rational empirical thinking associated with European colonial interests. The native tribe, by contrast, respond to the tree with blind, cultish worship and drunken, hedonistic, revelry. The story demonstrates how western nations asserted their authority through classification and the import of knowledge, with the perceived ignorance of the Madagascar tribe supposedly justifying imperial, colonial and multi-national interference in the area in keeping with P. D. Curtin's contention that "the golden age of racism was also the golden age of the Imperial idea" (Curtin 1960: 42).

With its interest in imperial knowledge and power, Gothic fiction also locates monsters on the fringes of the Empire and British spheres of interest. However, the map of weird news also places a significant number of monsters within developed, western, nations. Within the United Kingdom, Scotland appears to have been a particularly fertile breeding ground for monsters. The single largest concentration of monsters on the *British Library Newspapers 1800–1900* database, however, appears in the United States of America. Indeed, there are more monsters to be found in the US than in the entirety of Asia, Africa and Oceania combined, and nearly half of all monsters were to be found in the UK and the US. Weird news set in western locations has a different focus from examples set in the Empire. For

example, an 1818 American paper extract reprinted in the *Liverpool Mercury* discusses a monstrous snake. The account within the article is intended for those with “a strong predilection for natural curiosities” and details how a group of travellers encounter a monstrous “snake” in the wilderness of what would later become Minnesota.

a serpent of a most prodigious appearance, probably 15 feet in length, and proportionable in thickness, with four short legs ... His head was disproportionately large ... The back was of a shining black, covered with strong and apparently impenetrable scales. The belly was variegated with different colours. Its tail, on perceiving us, was coiled over the back, except when it beat the ground, which was always accompanied by the bellowing which first attracted us.

(“Another New Monster” 1818: 6)

Initially “transfixed with terror,” the group fail to capture the monster, but readers are reassured that “[a] party is already formed for the purpose, who are determined to brave every risk to gratify their curiosity respecting this wonderful creature” (“Another New Monster” 1818: 6). The speaker’s defensive tone conflates bravery, discovery and personal reputation, indicating that the pursuit of the unknown in frontier zones presented opportunities for the construction and consolidation of masculine identities.

This sentiment is shared by other American monster articles. An 1873 article in the *Dundee Courier* describes a man who encountered “A New Monster” as “a daring adventurer” who was “in the jungle hunting” when he was beset by a hybrid bear-lion-ox (“A New Monster” 1873: 6). Another 1873 article in the *Huddersfield Chronicle* presents a similar construction of masculinity in describing a sea-serpent sighting on the San Diego peninsula, where a captain and doctor saw “a frightful monster, full 30 feet in length, shaped like a snake, with three sets of fins, tail like an eel’s, and a head like an alligator” (“Another Sea Monster” 1873: 4). Yet both men were willing to brave great risks in an attempt to discover, combat and capture a creature unknown to natural science, or at least its carcass. Even when not occupying imperial or colonial spaces, monsters in weird news still largely demonstrate the relationships between authority, knowledge and the process of scientific categorisation identified by Macfarlane as typical of the Imperial Gothic. It is a matter of national, personal and masculine prestige to claim the unknown for “civilisation” so that it might become known. As the author of “The Bear Lake Monster” indicates, “it seems a pity this monster cannot be secured for the ... aquarium” (“The Bear Lake Monster” 1874: 7).

These monsters, despite not occupying canonical imperial frontiers, serve as unknowable elements on the remote edges, isolated frontiers or solitary waterways of western, developed nations. The encounter with “A New Monster” may have taken place in the relatively densely populated North Carolina, but the area in which the monster could be found in what is today the Great Smoky Mountains National Park remains a highly forested area to the current day. The location of the 1818 monstrous snake, in an area nearly forty years from being admitted to the union as the state of Minnesota, which shared a border with British territory and included land only recently acquired with the Louisiana Purchase, is particularly notable for its combination of shifting borders, Native American population and sparse settlement: even in 1870, the area still had an estimated population of less than two people per square mile. Consequently, such areas served as locations at the precipice of the unknown as indicated by Macfarlane.

The third key area for monster encounters was the sea. That so many examples of monster sightings in weird news took place at sea should be no surprise: even with all the technology at our disposal today, the depths of the ocean remain a relative mystery filled with strange phantasmagorias. In an 1822 article about mermaids, the very notion that the ocean did not “contain animals unknown to its surface, waters, or if ever, rarely seen by human eye”

was said to suggest that one was trying to “push scepticism to the extreme” (“The Mermaid” 1822: 18). Another example of weird news that presented the ocean as the abode of fantastic creatures is the 1876 article “A Diver Swallowed by a Sea Monster” discussed above, which asserted that “there can be no doubt that in the depths of the sea there exist uncouth fantastic monsters, which, like the Great Sea Serpent and the Devil Fish, are only seen occasionally by mariners” (“A Diver Swallowed by a Sea Monster” 1876: 2). While Macfarlane argues that in the Imperial Gothic the unknown produces anxiety (Macfarlane 2016: 75), these examples also demonstrate an excitement for the unknown to be discovered. The mermaid article responds positively to the possibility of an unknown “extraordinary natural phenomenon” and reacts with disappointment to the discovery of a hoax (“The Mermaid” 1822: 17–19). Similarly, the 1876 article’s description of monsters as “uncouth” and “fantastic” relays a sense of whimsy. Emily Alder in her discussion of the “Nautical Gothic” encapsulates the numerous elements of seafaring life that might make this setting so popular for weird news accounts of monsters:

Ships can be isolating, claustrophobic structures; ocean depths conceal monsters, secrets, bodies; the sea and its weather provide storms, sunsets, and remote locales for sublime and terrifying experiences; deep water is a useful metaphor for the interiority of the self; the ocean’s precarious surface interfaces between life and death, chaos and order, self and other. And the list could go on.

(Alder 2017: 1)

The idiosyncrasies of the Nautical Gothic reflect the unique and privileged perspective afforded to the ocean in weird news articles, many of which assert an unsubstantiated certainty in the existence of otherworldly creatures in the ocean’s depths. For this reason, as well as the abundance of nautical monster encounters, it is evident that “[t]reating nautical Gothic as a straightforward transposition of landward Gothic concerns to maritime settings would yield a fairly limited account of it – and also do a disservice to the role of the sea in global history and ecology” (Alder 2017: 1). Therefore, an analysis of this genre of weird news, one that accounts for the unique features of its oceanic setting, must be taken up independently of this study in order to further illuminate the subject.

In weird news, the unknown is not just a signifier of anxiety but also a space in which disenchantment can be dispelled. As Joshua Landy and Michael Saler observe, “wonder washes in from the formless and the vast” (quoted in Duchemin 2009: 1). By mapping these monsters and unnatural curiosities of newsprint, weird news challenges the teleological view of disenchantment. However, newsprint also created a space that allowed nineteenth-century anxieties to be explored in an ostensibly “truthful” medium which, unlike contemporary Gothic and science fiction, suggested the possibility that these horrors could really exist. Considering, then, how valuable a study of weird news can prove to these discourses, it is evident that periodical research is, as Matthew Rubery suggests, “a subject worthy of examination in its own right rather than as mere source material” (Rubery 2009: 11). It is also apparent that for nineteenth-century newspaper readers, the edges of the known world were as filled with sea-serpents, krakens, leviathans and other monstrosities as in Magnus’s *Carta Marina*. These nineteenth-century monsters, however, were to be found in the pages of novels and periodicals.



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